



WIFE Women Involved in Farm Economics

Nebraska Women Involved in Farm Economics
Governor's 2007 Farm Bill Listening Session
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Lincoln, NE

I'm Norma Hall representing Women Involved in Farm Economics (WIFE)
Thank you for this opportunity to share our thoughts on the 2007 Farm Bill. Agriculture is facing a financial crisis with escalating input costs and stagnant commodity prices.

WIFE considered the 2002 Farm Bill a contract with the U. S. Government. That contract has been consistently modified, short-changed, and ignored by the government we trusted. Why bother to write another Farm Bill when it might not even be worth the paper it is written on because it, too, is almost certain to be the target of budget cuts, personal interest groups, and an unfriendly USDA? An example of alterations to the 2002 Farm Bill is Country of Origin Labeling (COOL). Congress intended, and farm groups encouraged, food sold in the U.S. to be labeled as to the country of origin. Influential parties in the food service and retail markets opposed COOL. When the USDA finished the proposed rules for the implementation of COOL, the plan was labeled as unnecessarily burdensome and excessively expensive. The opposition used this flawed plan to create uncertainty in the minds of many who had originally supported COOL. Congress then successfully stopped the implementation of COOL by refusing to fund it. The contract with America's farmers and ranchers was altered.

Nebraskans cannot compete in a global market without a level playing field. Other exporting countries have more favorable growing conditions, cheap labor, and few labor standard laws. Many products controlled by American companies are sold cheaper in other countries. These include animal health products, herbicides and fertilizers, and seed. These issues need to be addressed. If Nebraska products are to be sold on the global market, we must be able to do so without tying the hands of producers with biased and unfair global trade agreements. We are clearly the target for complaints of the countries when they operate clearly in conflict with global trade agreements. Our country must assert itself instead of being the target.

In this time of terrorism, America must not sacrifice its own, home-grown supply of safe, abundant food to become dependent on foreign food sources. It is in the interest of national security America should protect our capacity to feed ourselves. Writers of the new Farm Bill must realize American farmers and ranchers need a price for their products so they can continue to produce. An adequate market price also insures the continuation of family farmers and ranchers on the land. This would contribute to the economic viability and growth of rural communities.

The 2007 Farm Bill must be written in such a way to reverse the trend of placing food production and processing into the hands of a few multi-national corporations. The 2007 Farm Bill needs a strong competition section with adequate safeguards for those entering contracts to produce our food supply. It needs a ban on packer ownership of livestock

more than seven days prior to slaughter to create more competition and allow smaller producers to find markets.

The best way farm policy can achieve conservation goals is to keep agricultural land in the hands of family farmers and ranchers who have a deep emotional empathy with the land and understand the value of good stewardship. This can be done only by stopping the manipulation of markets for the sole purpose of keeping farm prices down so others farther down the food chain can enjoy record profits at the expense of the grassroots producers. Prices cannot remain at the same level as prices thirty, forty, and even fifty years ago. Farm gate prices must be raised by whatever means it takes to do it. With fuel prices escalating every day, it is imperative that farm gate prices rise to cover these additional input costs.

Depending on "green" payments as the main source of financial support for farmers is neither equitable or realistic. These payments could become regionalized and disproportional. If matching funds were necessary, smaller farmers and ranchers might be penalized. If conservation programs are established, they need to be available all over the nation, not just in certain areas. Once a conservation program has been established, the rules and funding need to remain in force. Programs such as EQIP and Conservation Security Program (CSP) are excellent ideas but the CSP program needs to be fully funded. The current funding has been crippled at every opportunity since it was authorized in the last farm bill.

We don't need to wait for rancorous debates around the next farm bill to address important issues around commodity program reforms. This September, as part of the budget reconciliation process, Congress will address the related issue of limiting how much any individual farm can receive, regardless of the basis of payments. A payment cap needs to be established per conservation practice or per complete annual payment with NO LOOPHOLES. There should be only ONE payment per social security number. Payments limits would distribute scarce federal dollars more equitably thereby improving income for more farmers, keeping more farmers in operation, strengthening rural communities that depend on farming, and reducing incentives to overproduce crops already in surplus. In the last farm bill debates, payment limitation reforms were thrown out of the discussion as extreme and unreasonable measures. We are told that the cotton and rice farmer do not want payment limitations. Surely, a program could be written that would take in their high cost of production and still have payment limitations to some degree. Today, many political leaders recognize that what is unreasonable is allowing commercial large, very large and nonfamily farms receiving 50.8% of the government payments according to USDA, Economic Research Service in 2003.


Nebraska Women Involved in farm Economics also supports the continuation of Loan Deficiency Payments (LDP) and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), continued Agriculture Marketing Transition Act (AMTA) payments, permanent disaster assistance that does not require new legislation, and low interest-long-term loans to establish small businesses in rural areas. Additionally, WIFE supports funding for Cooperative Extension on a more permanent basis, a ban on packer ownership of livestock more than

seven days prior to slaughter, and non-recourse marketing assistance. WIFE supports long-term agricultural policy based on management of supplies that allows adequate inventories to meet domestic and export needs. Because weather events can adversely affect inventories, WIFE supports maintaining an adequate inventory through a Farmer Owned Reserve.

WIFE encourages USDA rules and regulations that are supportive of small processing plants, including but not limited to, allowing BSE testing of all cattle destined for export market, particularly Japan. WIFE also supports in-dept anti-trust investigations into large multi-national corporations that control a large percentage at any level of any given agricultural product through a Competition Title in the Farm Bill.

And finally, since we are a woman's agricultural group we emphatically expect the inclusion that those women who farm with their spouses be given equal "person status" for all USDA programs.

Thank you for allowing Nebraska Women Involved in Farm Economics this opportunity to express our thoughts in regard to the 2007 Farm Bill. We applaud your insight in facing this new legislation at this early time. We desire to cooperate with lawmakers to write a Farm Bill that will be positive for family farmer and rancher, consumers and the citizens of the United States.


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